

**Montana Department
of
Fish, Wildlife & Parks**



2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
August 2, 1996

TO:

Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 Director's Office
 Resource Assessment
 Fisheries Division
 Parks Division
 Regional Supervisors
 Lands Section
Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana State Library
George Ochenski
Montana Environmental Information Center

Ladies and Gentlemen:

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the **Bridger Fishing Access Site** acquisition on the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River near Bridger, Montana.

The scope of the proposed project has been determined to be sufficient to initiate the HB 495 (Section 23-1-110, MC) process. Both the Montana Environmental Policy Act and HB 495 report considerations are included in the following document. The specific items required in HB 495 are identified on the EA checklist and addressed in the comments of those respective sections.

Any questions or comments on this project should be addressed to the undersigned by September 13, 1996.

Sincerely,

Jim Darling
Regional Fisheries Manager
(406) 247-2961

Carbon

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings, MT 59105
(406) 247-2940

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Bridger FAS

Division/Bureau Fisheries

Program _____

Description of Project Acquisition of approximately 3 acres along the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River near Bridger, Montana, to allow angler access.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats				X		
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution				X		
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Aesthetics			X			HB 495
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		HB 495 Site capacity
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		HB 495

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income			X			HB 495 Tourism
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		HB 495 Maintenance
11. Industrial & commercial activity						
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		
15. Site specific modification system-wide				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction
City of Bridger

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA _____

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required

EA prepared by : Jim Darling

Date: August 7, 1996

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Acquisition of a Fishing Access Site on
The Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River near
Bridger, Montana

Prepared by
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
August 2, 1996

General Purpose: The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605 which directs the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislation established an earmarked funding account to ensure that this function would be accomplished. Acquisition of this site near Bridger will provide access to the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River for anglers and other recreationists.

I. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

A. Location of the Property

The approximately 3 acre site is located in Township 6 South, Range 23 East, Section 22 (Carbon County). It is adjacent to a county road and bounded by a county road right-of-way (ROW) just east of Bridger (Figure 1). Bridger is 46 miles southwest of Billings (Figure 2).

B. Need for the Action

The total estimated fishing pressure in Montana for 1993 was 2,300,763 angler days. In 1995, the Fishing Access Site (FAS) program had 312 sites distributed across the state in all major drainages. This program is an essential component of fisheries management in Montana because a large percentage of the angler use is achieved through these sites.

The estimated fishing pressure on the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River in Montana was 6,839 angler days in 1993. Anglers have historically used the old county road right-of-way to fish and to launch boats. More recently, an adjacent landowner has restricted access by fencing the ROW within his property.

Carbon County officials would like to turn the ROW and adjacent land over to FWP at the same time as the ROW at Initial Rock FAS (near Roberts). The City of Bridger would incorporate the county property upstream of the bridge to provide more security for their waste treatment facilities.

C. Scope of Acquisition and Development

Acquisition of ~3 acres of property along the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River is proposed for incorporation into the Department's Fishing Access Site (FAS) program. The nearest access is Bridger Bend FAS 13 miles upstream.

Eventual site development by FWP could include fencing, a parking area and turnaround, a boat ramp, and a latrine. The City of Bridger would maintain the site in cooperation with Carbon County.

II. IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Please review the attached checklist.

A. Impacts to the Physical Environment

5. Aesthetics

HB 495 requires consideration of the site's capacity for development. The site is bounded by an old and new paved county road, and was recently trenched (and covered) to install a water line. The entrance road and turnaround may include removal of a few Russian olive trees. The latrine should not detract significantly.

9. Acquisition will not affect historical or archeological sites.

B. Impacts on the Human Environment

6. Quantity and distribution of Community and Personal Income -- HB 495 Requirement - Tourism

See the section below entitled, "Commercial Activity."

7. Access to and Quality of Recreational Activities.

Activities at this traditional access may be restricted if the site is not purchased by Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

10. Demands on Government Services -- HB 495 Requirement - Long Range Maintenance of the Improvements.

The City of Bridger will maintain the road, ramp, fence and latrine, and pick up litter. FWP will pump the latrine vault as needed.

11. Commercial Activity -- HB 495 Requirement - Impact on Tourism

This acquisition and construction project proposal should maintain the site aesthetics and will have minimal impacts on the local economy or human distribution. This project will simply make river access more convenient for the angling public. The site project is not large enough to constitute a major attraction, unless the City of Bridger decides to further develop the site as a tourist attraction.

15. HB 495 Requirement - Describe how this project relates to the entire Fishing Access Site system, as a whole.

This project is minimal in scope and is therefore within the conservative intent of the entire system. There is nothing being proposed at this site that could be interpreted as a divergence from past management.

Strategic Planning accomplished by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks during 1992 has set five goals. Goal B is to "Provide parks resources while maintaining our commitment to improve landowner-sportsperson relations." The Fishing Access Site project is intended to accomplish this goal of providing expanded opportunity.

III. DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE

1) The "No Action" Alternative

If this property is not acquired the following situations are likely to occur:

- a. The recreational use at this site and along this reach of the Clarks Fork may be reduced if this traditional public access is closed by Carbon County.

2) The Proposed Alternative

The Bridger property acquisition is an effort to provide fishing access and site facilities at a reasonable management level. The project will result in the following:

- a. Continued use of a traditional access which may otherwise be closed to fishing.
- b. A responsible level of management of the site, including control of noxious weeds and litter.
- c. An increase in angler and other recreational use once facilities are provided.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CONCLUSIONS SECTION

1) Is an EIS required? No

This review has demonstrated that the impacts associated with this project are not significant. The net result of the proposed action is to maintain existing positive factors to the human and physical environment.

2) Describe the level of public involvement. HB 495 requirements of statewide advertising do not pertain to acquisitions.

Legal notices will be placed in the Billings Gazette and Helena Independent Record.

3) Duration of comment will extend to September 13, 1996.

4) Name, title, address and phone number of person responsible for preparing the EA document.

Jim Darling
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Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, Montana 59105
(406) 247-2961

FIGURE 2

